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Carnahan has strong record of standing up for airline employees' benefits, fighting to keep employees' seniority in tact after airline mergers

(WASHINGTON, DC) -- Yesterday the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Airline Flight Crew Technical Corrections Act to assist airline employees. The bill, co-sponsored by Congressman Russ Carnahan (D-MO), passed 402 to 9 and would make airline employees eligible for Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) benefits.

FMLA requires employers with more than 50 employees to allow their eligible employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave during a 12-month period for the birth and care of a newborn child, the placement of an adopted child or a child in foster care, the care of a family member with a serious health condition, or medical leave for them self if they have a serious health condition.

Currently to be eligible under the FMLA, employees must work at least 60% of a 40-hour work week over a 12-month period, which equals 1,250 hours over the course of a year. Airline crews generally do not qualify for the FMLA benefits because they do not reach that 1,250-hour threshold because currently only hours "in flight" count.

On average, flight attendants are scheduled for approximately 960 “in-flight” hours over the course of a year. Federal regulations limit a pilot to 1,000 hours of flying time each year.

The Corrections Act that passed today makes such employees eligible for FMLA benefits.

“I’m proud that this bill recognizes the hard work that airline employees perform,” said Carnahan. “There’s no doubt that those who spend so much time away from their family members deserve paid-leave when facing a serious health condition or when their family is in need.”

Carnahan was also a co-sponsor of the Reauthorization Act when he fought to include language providing for the fair and equitable integration of labor groups’ seniority lists during future airline mergers. The language was later included in the FY08 Omnibus Appropriations bill, which became law.

“Airline employees shouldn’t become victim of a more competitive airline environment,” said Carnahan. “It’s important we keep their well-deserved seniority intact.”

Prior to this law, flight attendants who worked for an airline that merged with a competing airline lost their seniority. In some cases, airlines laid off employees regardless of the combined total years working for the two airlines.